
TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL COMMITTEE INPUT ON DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

Top Tips

- ▶ Make a recommendation on the project at the earliest possible time (target the end of the first staff review cycle, which is generally 30 days after a project has been distributed to the group). This lets staff know your group's concerns and allows staff to coordinate issues with their comments. In addition, customers are more likely to make suggested project changes earlier in the process rather than at the end after several review cycles. Do not wait until the environmental document is complete.
- ▶ Make a recommendation on a project — even if the customer does not come to your meeting, provide you with information you have requested, or act in a professional manner.
- ▶ Communicate through your chair with the development project manager assigned to the project. The assigned DPM is your contact point to find out the project status, to get committee recommendations to, and to identify process concerns with. Having multiple committee members contacting various staff will result in inconsistent communication on the current status of a project and a false sense of committee issues.
- ▶ Encourage residents in your planning committee area to access project information through the planning committee. It is more convenient for them to look at plans closer to their homes and businesses than to come to the City. It also allows them to find out the committee review status and position on new projects.
- ▶ Do your best to make customers feel they are being treated and reviewed in a professional manner. Customers that are listened to, offered options, and communicated with will be more responsive to committee concerns.
- ▶ If you recommend denial of a project, make sure your reasons are clearly stated and provide alternatives that would be more satisfactory to your committee. Always assume the project could be approved as proposed by the customer. If you provide alternatives that are more acceptable, the decision maker may incorporate them into the design.
- ▶ Look at every resubmittal on a project since projects often change during the review process. If the committee has taken a position on a proposed project early in the review process, the committee should verify that the project design has not changed in a way that would affect that position.

Learning to Read Plans

The following information is excerpted from the "Planning Commissioner's Handbook 2000" by the League of California Cities. It provides instruction on the basics of plan review and some helpful references for planning committee members who review development projects.

Maps, plans, and drawings are the tools of planners and developers. Over time, planners and architects have developed a specialized language of contour lines, symbols and abbreviations to more uniformly describe development projects. While extremely efficient, the language of planning is not common knowledge among the lay public, and many planning commissioners must learn to interpret maps and plans from scratch.

Contour Lines

Contour lines are the primary two-dimensional graphic vehicle used to express three dimensional ground from.

A contour line connects all points of equal elevation above or below a known or assumed reference point or plane . Therefore, all points on the contour line have the same elevation.

Contour lines are used to study proposed changes in land form, and eventually to guide and direct the work of **earthmoving** contractors in executing a grading project.

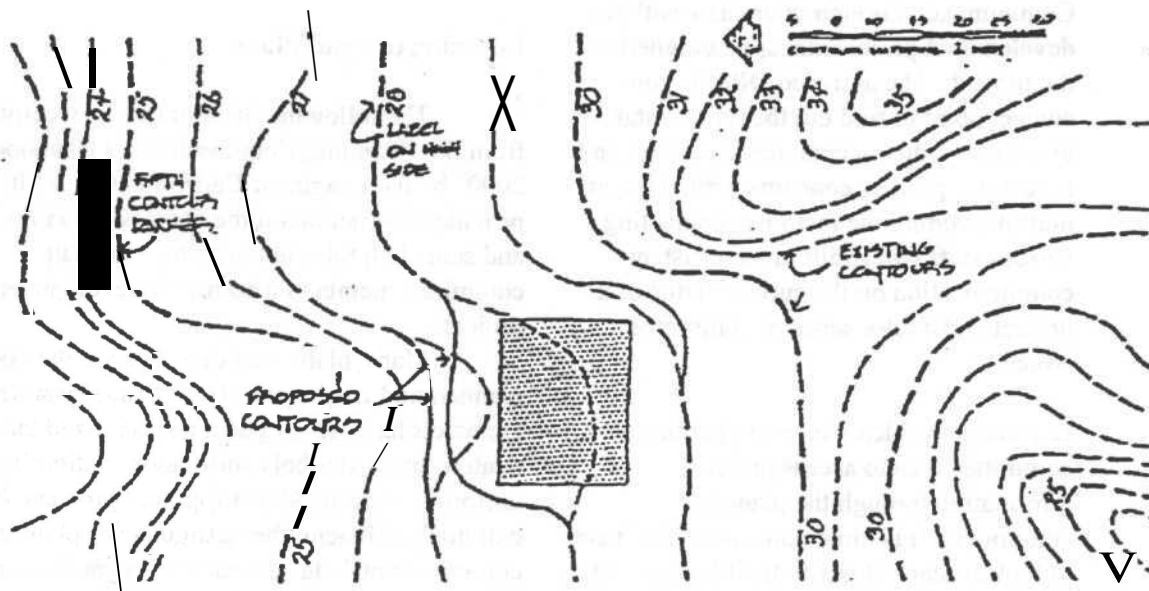
Contours show land forms, i.e., a hill, a valley, ridge, etc. They show the relationship of land forms - this hill to that valley, to this stream and finally to the ocean, etc. As contours are shown **two-dimensionally**, the scaled distance between them is exactly the same as in the field.

All contour plans have a contour interval which remains the same over the entire drawing. This interval stands for the vertical distance between contours, and is always indicated somewhere on the plan.

Proposed and existing contours are both shown on the same drawing. By showing both on the same drawing, it is possible to understand the exact location of work to be performed and the exact amount of work to be done. Existing contours are shown by a light dashed line (usually 1/4"-long, spaced about 1/16" apart). Every fifth contour is shown slightly darker for easy legibility. Proposed contours are shown as a solid light line. This solid line begins where you propose to make a grading change, and moves away from the existing (dashed) contour, returning to the existing (dashed) contour at the end of the proposed grading change. It is therefore possible to "read" the change by studying the area between proposed contours and existing contours.

Contour lines are labeled with the number on the high side of the contour. Contour lines correspond to a selected interval which may be 1', 2', 10', etc.

Generally, all contour lines on a map indicate the same interval and the interval should be labeled somewhere on the map.

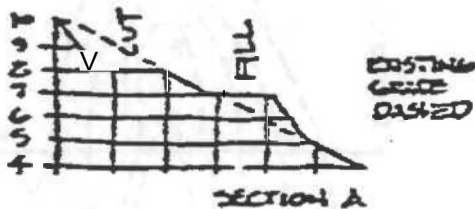


In an area of slight relief or generally flat and level country, the vertical interval may be as low as one foot, whereas in an area of marked relief it may be as large as 500, 250, or 100 feet. It sometimes happens that the relief changes from slight to marked within the limits of a map. When this is the case, intermediate contours are dropped or the vertical interval is changed from a small to a much larger one for the areas of marked relief.

"Reading" changes in contours is tricky, but can be mastered With practice. Basically, proposed grading changes either add earth (filling) or remove earth (cutting). A proposed contour

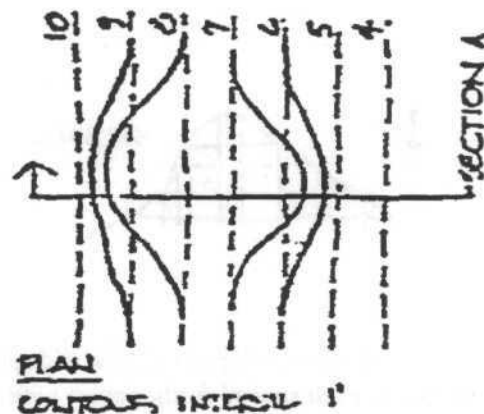
which moves in the direction of a lower contour is adding earth (filling). For instance (see diagram), proposed Contour 7 moves in the direction of a lower Contour (6) and indicates filling.

Conversely, a proposed contour which moves in the direction of a higher contour is removing earth (cutting). This can be seen where Contour 8 moves in the direction of Contour 9- and is removing earth (cutting). The amount of earth to be added or removed can be determined by comparing the proposed contour with the existing contours it crosses.



Profiles or sections can be constructed from contours and conversely, contour locations can be determined from profiles. A freehand construction of a cross-section is the best way to understand what the contours are doing. The following are most typical forms found in grading.

A summit is indicated by concentric closed contours, and adequate contour labeling to distinguish it from a depression. Depressions are



A valley is represented by contours which point uphill. To construct the section, draw first the place where the section is to be taken (Labeled A), then project up, parallel lines at each place a contour crosses 'A'. Somewhere above, draw lines parallel to 'A' and scaled according to the contour interval. Where the two lines cross becomes the section line, and one has only to connect these points to complete the section.

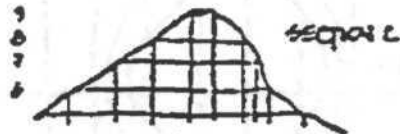
often labeled with hachures and both forms should include spot elevations at the highest or lowest point.



A ridge is shown similar to a valley, but with the contours pointing downhill. Note carefully the contour labeling, for this is the easiest



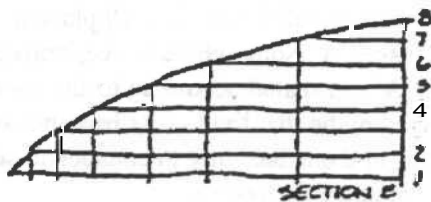
way to determine if it is a ridge or valley. Ridges and valleys often are very wide, and difficult to distinguish on a large scale map.



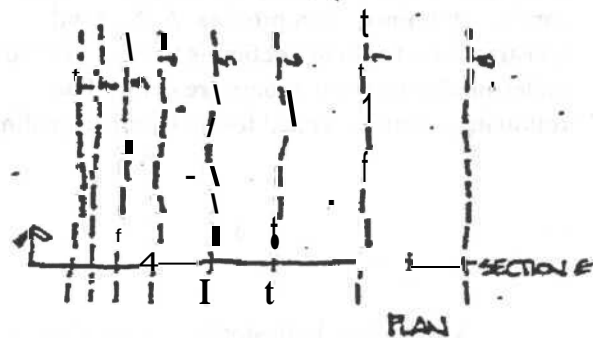
A convex slope is shown with parallel contours, each spaced further apart with the closer contours at the lower contours. Convex and



concave landforms are the most common forms found in nature and are well understood by landscape architects.



Conversely, a concave slope is shown with parallel contours, each spaced further apart starting

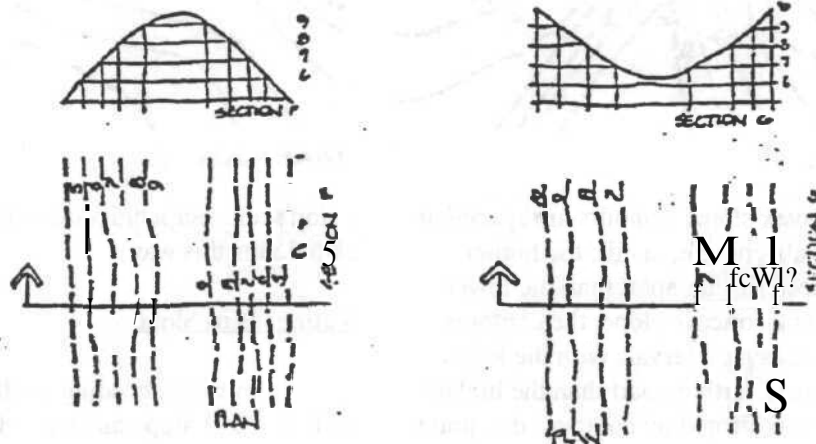


with the closely spaced contours at the top.



Two adjacent contours with the same numbers indicate either the top of a ridge or the

bottom of a valley. Again, the numbering indicates which it is, so check carefully.



Drainage always occurs perpendicular (at right angles) to the contours. The perpendicular line is the shortest distance between contours, and hence the steepest route (see Diagram 1). Water naturally seeks the easiest (steepest) route as it travels downhill in runoff. Channels, ditches, and valleys are indicated by contours which point uphill, and are sometimes made obvious by drawing an arrow in the direction of drainage or labeling it a SWALE (Diagram 2).

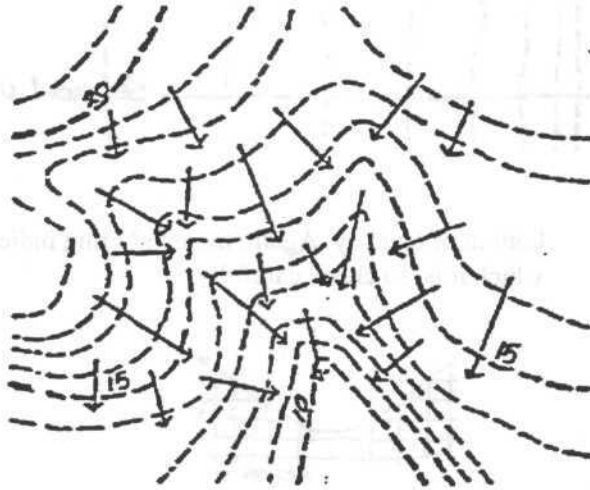


DIAGRAM 1

On a convex slope, contours are spaced at increasing intervals going up a hill; the higher contours are spaced further apart than the lower contour lines. On a concave slope, the contours are spaced at increasing intervals with the lower contour lines spaced further apart than the higher ones. Valleys are indicated by contours that point uphill. In crossing a valley, the contour lines run up the valley on one side, turn at the stream and run back the other side. Generally contours which are close together indicate a steep slope. Contours that are spaced far apart indicate a relatively level or slight grade. Contours never split; however, you will occasionally see two contours numbered the same and side by side. This indicates either a high area, or a low area. It will be high if the numbers for both contours fall in the same interval, and a low area if the numbers don't. The steepest area of

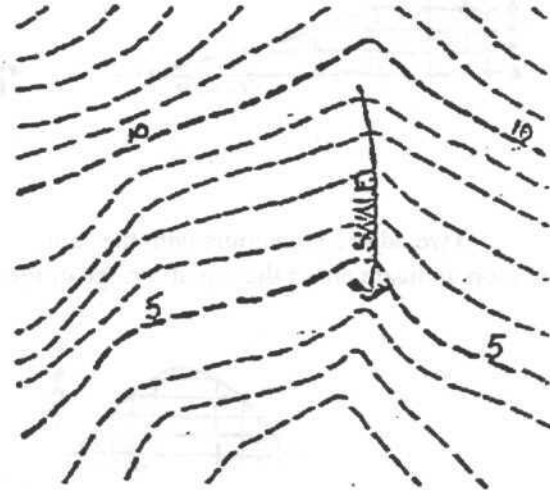
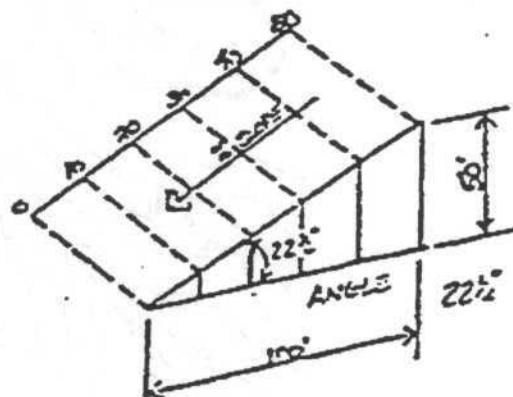
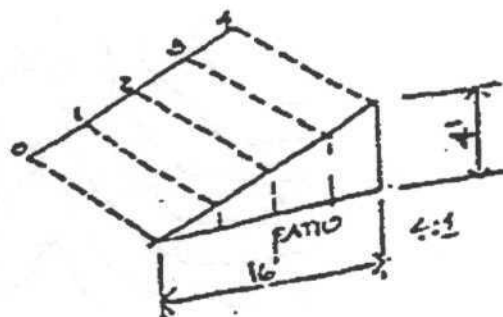
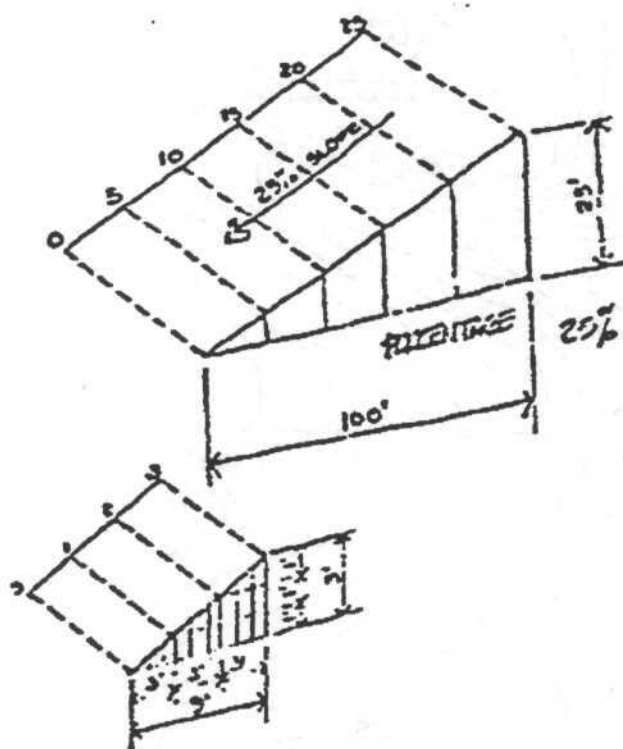


DIAGRAM 2

a slope runs perpendicular to the contours (water also drains this way).

Variations in Slope

In the proceeding we have talked about 2 to 1, or 3 to 1 slope and have described the manner to depict this by using contours. These slopes are necessary as it is not possible to pile earth, sand, soil, clay, etc., vertically, so we must slope these materials and the slope becomes either a 2 to 1, 3 to 1, 4 to 1, etc., slope (typically show 3:1). By 3:1 we mean three feet horizontal space is required for each one foot vertical change in elevation. As contours are shown in plan view to maintain a 3:1 slope, the contours (assuming 1' contour interval) would have to be spaced 3 feet apart.



Characteristics of Contours

1. All points on a contour line have the same elevation. A contour line connects points of equal elevation.
2. Every contour closes on itself within or beyond the limits of the map. In the latter case, the contour will not end on the map but will run to the edges.
3. A contour which closes on itself within the limits of a map is either a summit or a depression. A depression is usually indicated by the elevation at the lowest point, a spot elevation, or the letter "O" placed there. A depression is also indicated by placing short hachure marks on the low side of the contour line (See No. 3 for depression and 3a. for summit).
4. Contour lines never cross other contours except where there is an overhanging cliff, natural bridge, or pierced or arched rock.
5. Contours which are equally spaced indicate a uniform sloping surface (See No. 5).

section provides the basic knowledge needed by new **commissioners**.

Although planning commissioners may not ever see (or need to see) all the information received by the planning staff for a particular project, it may be helpful to know what type of information is being used by professionals to evaluate the development project.

The following list represents the basic information normally required by planning departments for submission of land use **applications**. Each city maintains a detailed list of all the necessary information that must be provided within each of these **elements**. These lists are very extensive and, to the layperson's eye, may seem overly burdensome. However, **with the** complexities of today's developments, this information is a necessity.

- Signed application - completed and signed application.
- Vicinity map - showing general location of project to neighborhood. Most cities require the applicant to submit a 300-foot radius map and a mailing list for all properties within the required noticing area. With new and expanding computer technology, some cities are taking on this function as part of their service to the applicants.
- Existing facilities map - showing all existing buildings, roads, walls, landscaping, signs, easements and **adjacent** property.
- Site plan - showing the proposed project from a bird's eye view. The plan is drawn to scale (should be same as existing facilities map) and should be large enough to be easily **discernable**. Most cities have standard size of plans and may require reductions for distribution to the commission, council and public.
- Elevations (architectural) - showing all sides of all proposed structures on the site.
- All exterior building surface materials should be shown, as well as a description of colors to be used. Elevations should be shown unobstructed by proposed landscaping materials. The elevation should show the entire building as it will be constructed, not necessarily as how it may look in several years with mature landscaping.
- Landscape plan - showing the proposed use of groundcover, shrubbery, trees and **hardscape** elements. The plans should indicate size and type of proposed trees and show any existing trees that will remain on-site.
- Sign plan (if applicable) - showing the proposed type, location, size, height, color, illumination source and materials of all signs **on-site**.
- Environmental questionnaire - providing the site specific information necessary to assess whether or not the project could have a significant impact on the environment.
- Materials board - providing representative samples of all proposed building materials and their colors. The board should make it easy to identify where the materials shown on the architectural plans will be used.
- Other special **submittals** - From time to time other information is needed to be able to properly review the proposed development. Some common additional requirements **are**:
 - ▶ Traffic analysis reports;
 - ▶ Biological studies (endangered species);
 - ▶ Utility reports (adequacy of availability of water, sewer, electrical, drainage, etc.);

- ▶ Wall plans (if not supplied as part of landscape plans);
- ▶ Cross-sections of the site or buildings - helpful in understanding complex structures and in determining adequacy of proposed screening techniques for outdoor storage and mechanical equipment;
- ▶ Preliminary grading plan to analyze impacts on ridge lines and

other natural features or to determine extent of cut and fill activities;

- ▶ Phasing plan for large and multi-phased projects;
- ▶ Renderings - colored drawings (or computer enhanced pictures) showing the building as it will be finally constructed, including buildings, landscaping, special features (fountains), signs, and the surrounding environment; and
- ▶ Color photographs to help visualize the site or surrounding area.

Site Plan, Landscaping, and Architecture Review Checklist

What should commissioners look for when reviewing landscaping, architectural and site plans?

Commissioners aren't responsible for assessing all of the technical merits of the development; that is what their professional staff does in their summary of the important aspects in the staff report.

The commissioner's primary job is to review the plans to determine whether:

- They meet the city's overall policies for quality development;
- They "feel right" to him or her as a community representative; and
- Anything has been overlooked.

After reviewing the plans, the commissioner should feel that he or she knows how the project will look and perform after construction. The ultimate objective to all of this planning and communication is to create livable

developments for people to use to live, work, shop and **recreate**. Being able to visualize the "built environment" from architectural drawings takes knowledge, experience and practice.

Commissioners may also want to take the time to visit built projects with the approved plans to compare the two, and identify any **misunderstandings**.

At First Glance: What to Look For

In general, the commissioner's initial review will result in gaining answers to the following issues of concern to the commission:

- Compatibility with surrounding uses - visual, acoustic, traffic, grading, aesthetic, etc.;
- Appropriateness of the design for the site - style, height, color, exterior lighting, landscaping, etc.;
- Compatibility of the design and site plan to existing and future on- and off-site uses;
- Internal circulation - vehicular and pedestrian, including handicapped access;
- Amount, size, and arrangement of the landscaping and open space; and
- Appropriate use and retention of natural land forms and vegetation.

The following is a list of steps that, when followed, will give a reviewer a basic understanding of a project in a short amount of time:

- Check the scale of the **plans**. Are they drawn at 1/4" = 1' or 1/8" = 1' scale or perhaps a 3/4" = 1' scale? Although the plans should be fully dimensioned, an architect's and engineer's scale is necessary in order to fully explore the plans. These may be found in local stationary stores or may be supplied by the planning department. A good way to get a

sense of the scale of plans is to draw in a person (next to a building) or a car (on the **site plan**).

- Look at the contours, both existing and proposed. Sections through the site should be required of projects that exceed 5+ in 100+. An outline of the building should be drawn in. How much grading is proposed? Make sure the finish floor elevations and parking lot finished grades are not so high that buffers such as landscaping are ineffective or that unanticipated retaining walls are necessary in undesirable locations.
- Locate existing trees. Are they to be removed? Can and should they be saved?
- Locate **adjacent** buildings, both on- and off-site. Is there any relationship between them, e.g., pedestrian walks, window-to-window visual contact, noisy areas adjacent to quiet areas or shadows cast over plaza areas?
- Check the circulation pattern for cars, delivery vehicles, pedestrians, and bicycles. Are there points of conflict, such as a lack of walkways that will cause people to walk through areas or between cars?
- Locate the landscaped **areas**. Does the landscape recognize the climate, soften the building or break up the expanse of parking areas or long blank portions of a building or wall? Are the planters large enough to accommodate desirable amounts of landscaping? Are there areas for special landscape and **hardscape** treatments?
- Check the parking layout. Do aisles relate well to entry-exit points, is there a logical pattern for cars to follow, are tire stops provided, and is there sufficient landscaping to screen parking from view

or to break up the expanses of asphalt?

- Are there any views from the site or of the site which should be preserved? Have they been preserved? (Visualize the site in various places to make this **analysis**).
- Are there any environmental concerns that the project should address, e.g., noise (on- and off-site), drainage, traffic or energy conservation (look at the location of windows and **landscaping**)?
- What is likely to happen on adjacent, undeveloped property? If it is a phased project, make sure that the first phase will stand by itself because of the possibility that the next phase will never be constructed.

Beyond the Basics - Detailed Design Considerations

As various plans are reviewed in more detail, check for the following items:

Site Plan

Layout

- ▶ Is the site crowded - too much paving and building with too little landscaping, space between buildings, etc.?
- ▶ Are the setbacks between buildings and adjacent properties sufficient? Are the buildings laid out rigidly or sensitively?
- ▶ Do exterior spaces recognize **climate**, topography, views, the type of activities that are to take place in them? Are the exterior spaces comfortable?
- ▶ Look at uniformity vs. a variety of spaces.

- ▶ Does the site plan recognize the location of noise, traffic, wind and sun?
- ▶ Does the plan reflect and respect the topography of the site (existing and proposed)?

Topography

- ▶ Does and should the project complement the existing topography?
- ▶ Are the proposed topographic changes aesthetically pleasing?
- ▶ Does the proposed grading blend well with that on **adjacent** property?
- ▶ Might there be drainage problems in the area or on the site? Are there unsightly drainage ditches, channels or swales that can go underground? If not, can they be aesthetically treated?
- ▶ Can significant trees be saved by revising the grading around them?

Circulation

- ▶ Are entry and exit points safe with good sight distance and adequate stacking distances maintained?
- ▶ Are street access points coordinated with median openings and access points on the opposite side of the street?
- ▶ Has the number of driveways onto adjacent street been minimized?
- ▶ Are acceleration and deceleration lanes needed and provided for on

busy arterial streets?

- ▶ Does the on-site circulation system make sense - no dead-end aisles, limited parking along main drives, and are the main drives too long or too chopped up? Is there a hierarchy of driveways leading from public streets to main drives to parking bays?
- ▶ Is adequate turning radius provided for large trucks and emergency equipment (police, fire, ambulance, utility trucks, etc.)?

Parking

- ▶ Are the required number of spaces provided? This should be summarized and printed on the plan as well as addressed in the staff report.
- ▶ Does the number and location of any compact spaces and handicapped parking locations make sense? Are they in areas where they are needed?
- ▶ Do aisle widths meet standards or have they been oversized for some reason, reducing landscape areas and increasing the amount of pavement? Are there pavement areas that really should be landscaped?
- ▶ Are parking bays well-screened by perimeter landscaping or low walls? Are they landscaped effectively on the interior to provide shade or offset large expanses of asphalt?

Loading

- ▶ Are special loading or drop-off areas needed?
- ▶ Are required loading areas properly screened from view?
- ▶ Does the location of loading areas ensure ease of delivery service with minimal conflicts with customers or residents and minimal effects on adjacent properties?
- ▶ What type of deliveries do you expect from the project and does the plan reflect adequate maneuvering?

Landscaping

- ▶ What is the visual value of the existing vegetation? Does the plan retain any plant materials? Should it?
- ▶ Does the proposed landscaping recognize the climate and local conditions (wind, rain, drought, sun, and plant diseases)?
- ▶ Does the landscape plan complement or does it conflict with the project's overall architectural theme? Do the materials complement the building or hide it?
- ▶ Are the planters large enough for their intended use and plant material? (planters that are only three feet wide located next to three story buildings are probably not sufficient.)
- ▶ Are special areas of the site plan reflected in the landscape plans - street corners, site entrance, building entrance, plazas and

architectural elements? Do these places exhibit special landscape elements (specimen plants or larger size material), hardscape materials (pavers, stamped/colored concrete, benches, etc.), waterscape elements (fountains, pools or streams) or special lighting elements?

Lighting

- ▶ Is night lighting provided? Is it aesthetically pleasing, compatible with the site and building design and appropriately located?
- ▶ Are walkways properly lit for safety reasons?
- ▶ Are lights used only for safety or utilitarian purposes or does the plan allow for special lighting (flood lights, up or down lighting, spot lights, bollards, etc.) of buildings, signs and landscape?
- ▶ Are security lights shown or planned? (These lights may be thought of after or during construction and when placed on a building or site may tend to disrupt an otherwise well designed plan.
- ▶ Will proposed light locations shine onto adjacent property or into adjacent buildings?

Signage

- ▶ Should there be a master sign program for the site or can the local sign ordinance handle it? If the project is a single tenant building, it may not be necessary. If the project is large or multi-tenant, an overall sign

program establishing general parameters may need to be considered.

- ▶ Do the business and project identification signs compliment the architecture of the site (style, color, size, materials and numbers)? Are they in proper scale to the site and buildings?

- ▶ How will signs be illuminated?

Trash Enclosures/Storage Areas

- ▶ Are trash enclosures that are viewable from public areas adequately screened and constructed of materials complementary to the site architecture? Are they adequately screened from direct view by masonry walls, landscaping, and/or trellises?
- ▶ Are outside storage areas permitted in the zone? If so, are they to the side or rear of buildings and screened from view? What materials are planned to be stored in the area? Will the proposed height of the screen walls be adequate to fully obscure the view of storage?
- ▶ Will people on surrounding properties or in adjacent buildings be able to look down on the storage area? Can these views be mitigated?

Building/ Architecture

- ▶ Style of buildings - is it consistent and/or interesting? Is the proposed architecture "true" to the style being used (Italianate, Spanish



Revival or Mission, High Tech, Federalism, etc. ?)

- ▶ Form of buildings - Does the building have a "base" and a "top"? Are the building facades flat and monotonous or are they varied and interesting? Does the building mass, height and planes of the building help to create greater visual interest? Are the building facades carefully and correctly (according to style) detailed, especially at the base, along cornices, eaves, parapets and **ridgetops**, and around entries and windows?
- ▶ Compatible use of materials and colors. Is the applicant proposing the use of building materials that are of high quality and long-lasting appearance, such as tile, stone, stucco, plaster or wood? Are materials substantial or of lesser quality, such as veneers?
- ▶ Roof design - does it add to the building? Does it screen rooftop-mounted mechanical equipment?
- ▶ Relationship to adjacent structures and the surrounding neighborhood. Does it fit in or does it seem out of place?
- ▶ Integration of signs with the building design.
- ▶ Relationship to day and night uses.

Zone Change Checklist

A zone change should not be granted unless there are sound reasons that relate to necessity and the welfare of the community.

It is not sufficient for an individual applying for a zoning amendment to show that there are no neighborhood objections to the proposal.

The burden of proof rests with those who are requesting the change - if there is not good reason to grant a change, the proper course of action is to deny the request.

Questions to Ask

1. Relationship to the entire community - Would the proposed change be contrary to the general plan land use policies and map? Is the proposed change incompatible with established land use patterns? Would the proposed change create an isolated district unrelated to similar districts, thus becoming spot zoning? Would the proposed change alter the population density pattern and thereby increase the load on public facilities such as schools, sewers, streets and the like, beyond community desires, plans or capacities? Are present district boundaries properly drawn in relation to existing conditions or development plans, with respect to size, shape, position and the like? .
2. Changed conditions - Have the basic land use conditions remained unchanged since adoption of the existing zoning? Has development of the area conformed to existing regulations?
3. Public welfare - Will the change adversely influence living conditions in the neighborhood? Will the change create or excessively increase traffic congestion? Will the change adversely affect property values in adjacent areas? Will the change be a deterrent to the improvement or development or **adjacent** property in accord with the existing regulations? Will the change constitute a grant of special privilege to an individual as contrasted to the general welfare?

4. Reasonableness - Can the property be used in accordance with the existing zoning regulations? Is the change requested out of scale with the needs of the neighborhood or the community? Are there adequate sites for the proposed use in districts permitting such use? Will an undesirable precedence be set by allowing the zone change at this location at this time?

Conditional Use Permit Checklist

Conditional use permits are rights granted to a property owner to use the owner's property in a manner that ensures no adverse impacts on adjacent property nor on the general community will result. The courts have stated that the "traditional purpose of the conditional use permit is to enable a municipality to exercise some measure of control over the extent of certain uses, such as drive-in restaurant, which, although desirable in limited numbers, could have a detrimental effect on the community in large numbers, or in certain locations."

To ensure that the conditions imposed by the commission, or other hearing body, will find the favor of the courts, it is recommended that the zoning ordinance define the uses that are subject to a conditional use permit and establish standards that apply to particular uses, such as distance from schools and residential districts, operating hours, avoidance of congestion, parking, lighting, noise, traffic circulation, etc.

As a general rule, conditional use permits require a finding that the proposed use is consistent with the general plan and zoning ordinance, and that "the establishment, maintenance, or conducting of the use for which a use permit is sought will not, under the particular case, be detrimental to the health, safety, morals, comfort, convenience or welfare of persons residing or working in the neighborhood of such use; and will not, under the circumstances of the particular case, be detrimental to the public welfare or injurious to property or improvements in the neighborhood."

A conditional use permit requires a public hearing and provides an opportunity for the general

public within the area of the proposed use to assist in the determination of whether or not the use will be injurious to the neighborhood.

A commission may not impose a requirement for the dedication of land or the posting of improvement bonds that are not reasonably related to the proposed use of the property.

A conditional use permit may be approved, denied for cause, or approved subject to certain conditions. Also, following a revocation public hearing, a conditional use permit may be revoked if sufficient cause is shown.

Of all the powers of zoning, the conditional use permit has the greatest potential for establishing and maintaining the character of a neighborhood. It also has the potential for the commission to abuse its discretion. The commission or hearing body should use its authority with care and thought.

Federal. State and County Agencies Involved in Development

AQMD. Air Quality Management District. A regional agency responsible for regulating sources of air pollution.

California Coastal Commission. A state agency that reviews development plans within the coastal zone according to the California Coastal Act of 1976.

Department of Fish and Game. A state agency that manages California's diverse fish, wildlife and plant resources, and the habitats upon which they depend, for their ecological values and for their use and enjoyment by the public.

Department of Fish and Wildlife. The principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. It also oversees the federal aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

BCD. State Department of Housing and Community Development. The state agency responsible for assessing, planning for and assisting communities to meet the needs of low- and moderate income households.

BUD. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. A cabinet-level department of the federal government that administers housing and community development programs.

LAFCO. Local Agency Formation Commission. See Gov. Code § 54773 and following. In California, the agency in each county that is responsible for processing and regulating sphere of influences, annexations, detachments and incorporations of county lands.

OPR. The Governor's Office of Planning and Research is the comprehensive statewide planning office and provides research staff to the governor. OPR provides basic research, long-term planning and policy development consonant with its statutory mandates, and interdisciplinary policy and review relative to growth management and intergovernmental affairs.

State Clearinghouse. A part of the Governor's Office of Planning and Research (see "OPR," above) which has three primary functions, including coordination of state agency review of environmental documents, coordination of state and local review of federal grant applications, and technical assistance on land use planning and CEQA matters.